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MR. GLADSTONE

Also by
HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

THE
SEVEN DEADLY VIRTUES

A Play Sequence

The Seven Deadly Virtues—In a
Glass Darkly—Various Heavens

GERALD BULLETT:

(in John o' London)

"The least numerous class of plays consists of those pieces which have high value both as drama and as literature. This class includes, among the work of living playwrights, nearly all Shaw, nearly all Granville Barker, much of James Bridie; and now to these names must certainly be added that of a newcomer to the theatre, Hugh Ross Williamson. . . . He has all the gifts of the ordinary competent dramatist, and with two extras—intellectual liveliness and technical audacity."

JOHN BRANDANE:

"Hugh Ross Williamson is Somebody—really Somebody! He has everything his type of dramatist needs most, especially in depicting the rich variety of life.

"I am sure Williamson will find richer spoil than Galsworthy or Barker did in their fields—good though their hunting was."

F. SLADEN SMITH:

(in Drama)

"The author has a curiously brilliant touch, a grasp of character reminiscent of Galsworthy, and a Freudian outlook."

JAMES BRIDIE:

"*Various Heavens* is I think very, very good. It is like Granville Barker at his best. The theme is handled brilliantly and Beatrice's ironical speech at the end is really daring and, I think, successful."

HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

MR. GLADSTONE

A Play in Three Acts

CONSTABLE · LONDON · W.C.2

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Strand, London, W.C.2, to whom all
applications for permission should be
made.*

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FOR
FRANK WHITAKER

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS play was written in 1937 for the Gate Theatre Studio. That is to say, it was written for a particular audience, which might be presumed to have seen Elsie Schaffler's "Parnell" and Laurence Housman's "Victoria Regina." Both these plays, in my opinion, were extremely partisan statements on political matters still recent enough to be controversial. "Parnell" presented what can only be described as a gross caricature of Gladstone himself, besides completely falsifying the Home Rule issue as it affected the two men. Mr. Housman seems to me to over-sentimentalise a Queen who appears to have been one of the more unattractive characters, as she was certainly one of the most unconstitutional monarchs, who have occupied the English throne. It was my criticism of these dramatised versions of history which led to the writing of "Mr. Gladstone" as an attempt to present to the audience which first saw them in England the real issues of the time, conveyed as nearly as possible in the actual words of the characters.

"Mr. Gladstone" is, therefore, an arrangement rather than an invention, and it will not be out of place to record my indebtedness to the principal works I have consulted in writing it—Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, the *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Philip Guedalla's *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, Viscount Gladstone's *After Thirty Years*, Mary Drew's *Catherine Gladstone*, and her *Diaries and Letters*, *Gladstone and his Wife* and *The Gladstone Papers*, both edited by A. Tilney Bassett, Frank Hardie's *Political Influence of Queen Victoria*, Ponsonby's *Sidelights on Queen Victoria*,

Bernard Holland's *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, J. L. Garvin's *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Monypenny and Buckle's *Life of Disraeli*, Pierre Crabitès' *Gordon, the Sudan and Slavery*, St. John Ervine's *Parnell*.

This is by no means an exhaustive list even of the books I have used, but the reader of just these few will be in a position to judge of the worth or otherwise of this play as a reconstruction of the essential policies of twenty years, telescoped into the limits and observing the limitations of a piece for the stage.

I should like also to record my gratitude to Mr. Tilney Bassett, than whom none living knows more about Gladstone, for his kindly help and advice; and to Mr. Norman Marshall, both for producing the play and for so far pandering to an indignation which he did not share as to suggest that I should write it.

HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON.

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

CATHERINE GLADSTONE

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, EARL OF BEACONSFIELD

QUEEN VICTORIA

THE MARQUIS OF HARTINGTON

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

GENERAL GORDON

JOHN MORLEY

SIR HENRY PONSONBY

The Queen's Private Secretary.

EDWARD HAMILTON

Mr. Gladstone's Secretary.

SCENE

The scenes are set over a period of eighteen years, from 1876 to 1894, and include Mr. Gladstone's "Temple of Peace" at Hawarden Castle, a room in 10 Downing Street, and an audience chamber at Windsor Castle.

ACT I

The "Temple of Peace" at Hawarden on a morning in the late summer of 1876.

MR. GLADSTONE is, when the curtain rises, hidden from sight behind the pages of *The Times*, which he is reading in his armchair. In the centre of the room is his writing-desk, presided over by the famous bust of Disraeli. At the *escritoire* by the further wall his wife, CATHERINE, is seated. He is sixty-five. His appearance is well enough known—the dark complexion, the powerful, darting eyes, the monumental head and brow, the rapid, restless gestures. She, at sixty-four, is of vitality no less than his, and still beautiful. But there is more than beauty. Her gaiety and humour, her boundless charity and almost equally boundless tolerance, have left their mark on her. She is now writing letters with a quill. She seals an envelope, throws it carelessly on the floor, to join others already there, then turns to him and speaks softly.

CATHERINE

William . (Then, as he does not answer, louder.)
William!

GLADSTONE

I beg your pardon, Catherine. I was just reading the case of that Manchester burglar—the one you were speaking of yesterday. It appears that he certainly was a most ingenious criminal, and not without courage.

CATHERINE

They haven't caught him?

B

GLADSTONE

Yes, indeed; and convicted him. Penal servitude.

CATHERINE

Oh dear!

GLADSTONE

Surely you are not sympathising with him? A man who's robbed——

CATHERINE

[*Interrupting.*]

I'm sure he's been very wicked and, of course, it's wrong for him to steal; but, William, how *dull* the poor man will be in prison, after all that excitement!

GLADSTONE

That is hardly a consideration we can base the law on.

CATHERINE

No, naturally not, dear. But I was just thinking of the *man*. Life will be so vull for him.

GLADSTONE

[*Thinking he has not heard correctly.*]

Dull?

CATHERINE

Yes, dull *and* vull.

GLADSTONE

Vull? And when did you invent that one, and what exactly does it signify?

CATHERINE

Null and void. It expresses it, don't you think? Or not?

GLADSTONE

[Non-committal.]

Ye-es. Though I liked "The cat will be in the fire" better. It so exactly expresses one's hopes of Dizzy's policy. But, Catherine, you must be careful of it when we're out. You quite frightened poor Caroline at dinner on Wednesday.

CATHERINE

I didn't notice it. It would take a great deal to frighten Caroline—not that she ought not to have been nervous anyhow in that 'look at me' dress she was wearing. What did I say?

GLADSTONE

As far as I could hear, you said: "And, by the way, I shall be wanting some flesh from you for my Orphanage."

CATHERINE

Did I? Oh yes, of course I did. How stupid of me! But, then, I expect she knew what it meant. She must know the "Merchant of Venice."

GLADSTONE

Yes, dear, but even I, who know both the "Merchant of Venice" and you, am still puzzled by the exact logic which makes "flesh" mean "hard cash."

CATHERINE

I've told you, William, it's when Shylock couldn't get the flesh and said he'd take the ducats instead.

GLADSTONE

Still a little involved, I think. But never mind. I know what it means.

[He goes back to his paper.]

CATHERINE

That's really why I interrupted you, dear. I want some flesh. Is your cheque-book there?

GLADSTONE

And for what have you turned pickpocket now? You know I did give you ten pounds for your Orphanage and twenty pounds for your Convalescent Home only last week.

CATHERINE

It's only five pounds this time; and it's personal.

GLADSTONE

For yourself? If you promise me it's really for yourself, I'll make it fifty.

[He gets up with difficulty, and goes over to the desk.]

CATHERINE

Lumbago still bad?

GLADSTONE

Much better than it was, but still a twinge. *(As he gets out his cheque-book from a drawer.)* For you?

CATHERINE

Of course it's not for me, William. When I said 'personal' I meant it's for a person.

GLADSTONE

Quite proper. Whom?

CATHERINE

A woman I met in the train the day before yesterday. So nice, but so poor.

GLADSTONE

Who was she?

CATHERINE

I really forget her name. Though I've got it in my book. Her husband has to go to Australia, and they can only afford one passage; so it'll mean, if we can't collect the money, they'll be separated.

GLADSTONE

You don't think it's just a tale to get your sympathy?

CATHERINE

No, dear, I'm too used to those tale-tellers. And she was so interesting about everything that I quite forgot to get out at Woodford and then—William, it was *so* awkward!—when the train stopped at the next station, I found I'd forgotten my purse, and I had to borrow from the poor woman to pay my fare back.

GLADSTONE

I see. A debt of honour?

CATHERINE

Oh no! Of course I sent her that at once. This is just to help pay her passage. I'm writing to Freddy and Lucy, too. They're sure to send something. (*Quietly.*) Think if *we* were separated, William.

[*He gives her the cheque.*]

Fifty pounds! Thank you, dear. That is generous. It'll pay nearly all. There won't be any need to ask the others.

GLADSTONE

A little thank-offering, Catherine. If we *had* been separated . . . (*A pause; her arm is round his*

MR. GLADSTONE

shoulder, her other hand in his.) God has been very good to us.

[Another pause ; then, as she returns to her escritoire, she sings softly to break the tension.]

CATHERINE

“A gallivanting husband and his rantipoling wife.”

GLADSTONE

[Joining in.]

“We’ll fiddle it and scrape it through the ups and downs of life.” *(A pause.)* And now for some Homer. I think I may just finish my study of Poseidon by Saturday. A most curious and exotic personage.

CATHERINE

It won’t interrupt you—my being here?

GLADSTONE

How could it? Though I reluctantly admit, Catherine, there have been times when I wish you could bring yourself to use a steel pen.

CATHERINE

[Firmly.]

No. So dull. No character like a quill has.

[She puts the cheque in an envelope, scribbles an address, stamps it, and throws the letter on the floor. He gets out some foolscap sheets covered with writing and his copy of Homer, but before he really settles down she interrupts him.]

William!

GLADSTONE

Yes?

CATHERINE

I'm just going to write to Arthur. You know in his letter the other day he asked if you weren't going back into politics properly. As leader of the Party.

GLADSTONE

[*Decisively.*]

No.

CATHERINE

The country wants you, he says. The Tories are saying it's religious mania that's made you retire. It's your writing on "Future Retribution," I suppose.

GLADSTONE

[*Grimly.*]

I can quite understand Dizzy's endeavour to discredit as mania a belief in future retribution.

CATHERINE

And Arthur says that Dizzy being made Earl of Beaconsfield is a defeat that you ought not to allow.

GLADSTONE

How ridiculous of him! How can such an 'honour' affect me in any way? Does he think I ought to become Earl of Hawarden? Dizzy has been rewarded for his foreign policy, which is the most selfish and unworthy I have ever known. Whatever was bad in Palmerston's has been developed tenfold by Dizzy.

CATHERINE

Palmerston was Prime Minister at eighty, wasn't he?

GLADSTONE

Yes.

CATHERINE

It makes sixty-five seem very early to retire.

[GLADSTONE *does not answer.*]

William, you *do* think it *right* for you to leave it all—for Homer?

GLADSTONE

[*More^e uneasily.*]

Yes. Hartington is quite a good leader.

CATHERINE

Harty-Tarty! He's a dear, of course, but he's not very *exciting*.

GLADSTONE

He does very well. There's no chance of upsetting Dizzy for some years. And the country has shown it doesn't want me. After all, Catherine, I did a good deal. I gave them free education, international law, secret voting; I reformed^d the Army and gave some justice to the Catholics in Ireland; I paid twenty-six million off the National Debt, left a surplus of five million in the Treasury, and was prepared, if we had been returned, to abolish the Income Tax. For one Parliament, it's not a record to be ashamed of. But the country threw me out.

CATHERINE

[*Suddenly concerned.*]

You're not bitter, William?

GLADSTONE

That's a strange question from you.

CATHERINE

I know you're not, really. ^{But} But I feel that *I* should be.

GLADSTONE

You even less than me. No, Catherine, it's better as it is—much better. Sixty-five is quite near enough to the allotted span. One mustn't face the Judgment unprepared. Dizzy is welcome to his Earldom and his power with the Queen; though if he should continue to use that power to destroy England . . . (*A pause; then, decisively:*) No.

CATHERINE

If he should do that, then you might go back?

GLADSTONE

You want me to, don't you? You really prefer Number 10 Downing Street to this Temple of Peace?

CATHERINE

Well, William, I always feel you're better when you're in the thick of things. But all I want is for you to do whatever is right. Of course I know you will. Even I couldn't hold you if the battle-cry really sounded. (*Having seen the effect of this remark she continues.*) You think that Dizzy is destroying England? How, particularly?

GLADSTONE

This foreign policy of his; this Dizzyism; though one should say Beaconsfieldism now, I suppose! Its other name is Imperialism.

CATHERINE

That's rather nicer, don't you think? So much more anonymous. A good modestication.

GLADSTONE

Its name, unfortunately, does not alter its nature.

Whatever you call it, it's a foreign thing—like himself. Oriental—an outward splendour to glorify tyranny, a thing based on force and slavery. Not the English way of liberty.

[In his excitement he rises and speaks, not rhetorically but with intense feeling—for this is the very heart of him—to the bust of Disraeli.]

There's a thing that, with all your subtlety, you can never understand—how the true spirit of England lives rather in the little tribes and nations struggling to be free than in the armies you would send to rob them of that freedom. You have taken India; to guard India, you are taking Afghanistan and Egypt; to guard Egypt, you will have to take more of Africa. Where's the end? And for this you will make future generations pay and pay in blood and gold! And for what? For England? Will the masses be happier or the classes richer? No, my friend. It is for your own kind that you work—for the adventurer, the gambler and those consumed by the lust of power. . . . (*The spell breaks.*) Forgive me, Catherine.

CATHERINE

No, dear, do go on. I often wonder if Dizzy realises how much his face is your fortune. But, William, surely he's not done anything about Egypt, has he?

GLADSTONE

He's sent the Fleet to Biseka Bay. That's the beginning. He'll end up as Duke of Memphis yet. The only thing that may prevent him is his love of the Turks. Though I doubt it. Even that is less than his love of himself.

CATHERINE

That he or *anyone* should dare to support the Turks

after these terrible massacres in Bulgaria! Can't you do something about *that*, William?

GLADSTONE

What can I do? I had thought of a pamphlet suggesting that the Turks are cleared out bag and baggage. But what good would it do? Most unfortunately it's not a live issue in the country.

CATHERINE

Don't you mean in the Clubs, dear? I was speaking to some people at Woodford, and they were *very* indignant about it all. You've always said that the Upper Ten didn't care a button for the cause of humanity.

GLADSTONE

No, their heads are too full of class interests, and the main chance. That means that they'll always be with Dizzy. But in these Turkish massacres it doesn't seem as if even the masses care, though if they did—if they did—— (*He checks his thoughts sternly and returns to his Homer.*) No!

[A MAID comes in with two piles of letters on a salver. One she gives to GLADSTONE, the other to CATHERINE.]

MAID

These are yours, Madam.

CATHERINE

Thank you. You might collect those—(*indicating the letters on the floor*)—for the post.

MAID

[*Doing so.*]

Yes, Madam.

[MAID goes out.]

[While GLADSTONE looks through his pile of letters without opening them, CATHERINE opens and reads one of hers, then says :]

CATHERINE

Oh, William, only think! Such exciting news from the Convalescent Home. The Cook and the Captain are going to be married. They arranged it all while Miss Simmons was away, too.

[She looks across at him and notices he has put aside his pile of letters, unopened, and is writing, quite oblivious to her chatter.]

Oh, of course, dear; stupid of me to interrupt again. You stay on Olympus with the gods and goddesses.

[He looks across at her and smiles. She opens another letter and reads it; then another, of which she gives him the news, irrepressibly.]

Mary says she'll be home for the Flower Show; she's just been to the Crystal Palace with Carrie and Mr. Irving. . . . Heard a Bach fugue and saw the performing elephants. . . . They don't seem to go very well together somehow, do they?

[GLADSTONE still writes.]

Oh, I forgot.

GLADSTONE

It's all right, I've finished it now, dear.

CATHERINE

Finished what?

GLADSTONE

It's the best I could do on your somewhat scanty information.

CATHERINE

Information on *what*, William?

GLADSTONE

Of the Cook and the Captain. Shall I read it to you, or would you like to read it yourself?

CATHERINE

I haven't the least idea what it is, but I think you had better read it.

GLADSTONE

[Reading.]

The Cook and the Captain determined one day,
When worthy Miss Simmons was out of the way,
On splicing together a life and a life
The one as a husband, the other as wife.

Folderol, tolderol, folderol—la.

When Miss Simmons came home she shouted " Oh dear,

What riot is this? What the devil is here?

If the Cook and the Captain will not be quiescent
How can I expect it from each convalescent? "

Folderol, tolderol, folderol—la.

BOTH

[Laughing.]

Folderol, tolderol, folderol—la !

CATHERINE

I think I'll send it to them with the wedding present. May I?

GLADSTONE

If you think they'll like it.

CATHERINE

Is there anything in your post?

GLADSTONE

I've not attended to it yet, but it doesn't look

important. (*He opens the top letter.*) Ah, this is from Newman.

CATHERINE

The Cardinal?

GLADSTONE

No, his brother. (*He reads it through in silence and then remarks :*) That's exceedingly good of him.

CATHERINE

What does he say?

GLADSTONE

Thanks me for services he thinks I have rendered the country and ends with Euripides: "Happy the man who from the flood has fled the storm and found the haven." (*He opens another letter.*) And here's a better poem than mine.

CATHERINE

Who from?

GLADSTONE

[*Reading.*]

"I am little more than a boy and have no literary interest in London, but perhaps if you saw any good stuff in the lines I send you some Editor might publish them."

CATHERINE

Anyone we know?

GLADSTONE

No, I'm not familiar with the name. Wilde—a Mr. Oscar Wilde. It's a sonnet "On the recent massacres of Christians in Bulgaria."

CATHERINE

Good?

GLADSTONE

You read it. You're a much better judge of poetry than I am. But I'm sure it's the right spirit.

[He passes it to her and opens another letter. He reads this carefully, then rises excitedly and says :]

Then the country *does* care!

CATHERINE

For what?

GLADSTONE

Forster writes that there is a popular meeting and protest being held in Hyde Park about the atrocities in Bulgaria. In a fortnight. That means there's a conscience in England still. The masses won't stand quietly to watch Christians murdered by Turks even for Dizzy's sake. It may be that they'll want a voice. I'll do that pamphlet, Catherine, and if they ask for a leader, perhaps, after all I—I—can——

CATHERINE

Is it 'Yes,' William?

GLADSTONE

Yes. In God's name, yes.

[The scene fades out and through the dark come the shouts of NEWSBOYS reminding us of the events which followed MR. GLADSTONE'S momentous decision.]

"GLADSTONE on Bulgarian atrocities; seventy thousand copies sold."

"GLADSTONE rouses the country."

"GLADSTONE attacks Government's foreign policy."

"GOVERNMENT annexes the TRANSVAAL."

"GOVERNMENT declares war in AFGHANISTAN."

"GOVERNMENT declares war on the ZULUS."

- "GOVERNMENT intervenes in EGYPT."
- "GOVERNMENT to face the country; general election."
- "GLADSTONE to contest MIDLOTHIAN."
- "MIDLOTHIAN campaign; late news."
- "Latest News. GLADSTONE elected."
- "Crushing Government defeat."
- "LORD BEACONSFIELD resigns."
- "LORD BEACONSFIELD sees the Queen."

On this cry the lights come up again on a room in Windsor Castle, where LORD BEACONSFIELD is taking his farewell audience of QUEEN VICTORIA. Both are seated.

The "DIZZY" of this period has never been better described than by Lytton Strachey's sentence; "After a life-time of relentless determination, infinite perseverance and superhuman egotism, he found himself at last, old, hideous, battered, widowed, solitary, diseased, but Prime Minister of England."

At this moment when he has to relinquish the prize for which he has striven so hard, he is extremely downcast, but he conceals it as well as he can from the QUEEN, except in so far as it helps to give sincerity to the flattery which, true to his own advice, he continues to lay on with a trowel. He is seventy-five, fifteen years older than the QUEEN, and looking even more—a difference in age which should be made very obvious on the stage.

The QUEEN herself, at sixty, is undeniably 'difficult.' She has not the charm of her youth, the pathos of recent widowhood, or the sentimental appeal of her old age. She has, to a large extent, surrendered her independence of judgment to the dazzling attentions of "DIZZY," and is in process of becoming that obstinate conservative old lady whose continual nagging almost broke even MR. GLADSTONE'S

spirit. As she wrote in her diary about this time, in one of her rare moods of self-analysis (as distinct from self-pity) : " I feel how sadly deficient I am and how over-sensitive and irritable, and how uncontrollable my temper is, when annoyed and hurt."

QUEEN VICTORIA

But who could have expected, dear Lord Beaconsfield, that it could have been so *sweeping*? There is no gratitude in the country. I am shocked and ashamed. I cannot understand how the people could be so *mad*. After Mr. Gladstone has done so much *mischief*!

BEACONSFIELD

" Bag and Baggage Billy " has, regrettably, the gift of the gab. One cannot deny that. He is intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity. But unfortunately he can also intoxicate others. The weaker kind, of course.

QUEEN

How weak indeed! But I will not and cannot have anything to do with him.

BEACONSFIELD

Of course his hypocritical wiles would be powerless against your strength and sagacity.

QUEEN

Indeed I could never have the slightest particle of confidence in him after his violent, mischievous and dangerous conduct. To make a party question of your foreign policy!

BEACONSFIELD

Yours, Ma'am.

QUEEN

Mine, of course. But I can never forget how much of my greatness, England's greatness, is due to you.

BEACONSFIELD

I have been only the very humble instrument guided always by your wisdom. You *are* England.

QUEEN

Dear Lord Beaconsfield!

BEACONSFIELD

And though I deplore this defeat, the real sting lies not in resignation; it is in separation from my Sovereign. That I shall no longer have the delight of communicating with one who, though so far above me, has deigned to illumine my old age with the ineffable gift of her friendship—that is my misery now.

QUEEN

[*Anxiously.*]

But you must not think of this as a real parting. I shall always let you hear how I am and what I am doing, and you must promise the same.

BEACONSFIELD

If you had forbidden it, it would have been your one command that I should have found it almost intolerable to obey. Yet I fear that there is an objection.

QUEEN

What objection can there possibly be?

BEACONSFIELD

I doubt whether the Constitution allows the Sovereign to communicate with the Leader of the Opposition.

QUEEN

This has nothing whatever to do with Constitution. I shall write to you as one friend to another. That is settled.

BEACONSFIELD

But——

QUEEN

[*Interrupting.*]

That is enough, Lord Beaconsfield. The Queen has spoken.

— [BEACONSFIELD *smiles contentedly.*]

Besides I shall need you to be very watchful for my sake and the country's. England's position must *never* be weakened. The terrible things Mr. Gladstone has been saying about withdrawing from the Empire are *too* alarming. He must not be *allowed* to.

BEACONSFIELD

Fortunately, when the time comes the Liberals will find they are unable to. We have committed them too far.

QUEEN

You can positively assure me of that?

BEACONSFIELD

I can.

QUEEN

That is at least one thing to be thankful for.

BEACONSFIELD

You will remember that when I pressed Your Majesty to take the title Empress of India, it was Mr. Gladstone who opposed it.

QUEEN

[*Shaking with indignation.*]

We are not likely to forget that.

BEACONSFIELD

It was not to recall the painful memory of an insult that I mentioned it, but to remind you that, for all his opposition, he is powerless. You *are* Empress of India, and the Liberals are bound to sustain your interests no less than our own Constitutional party.

QUEEN

That is a little consolation; but now I fear we must consider my next sad duty—to call for your successor. What do you advise for the real good of the country?

BEACONSFIELD

The real good of the country is inseparable from your own, though I know only too well how at the touch of duty any personal desires melt away like snow in sunshine. First we must consider Mr. Gladstone.

[*The QUEEN makes a gesture of distaste.*]

In one sense he can hardly be neglected. He certainly sees himself in my place. In his campaign against your government he has been animated by a greed for office such as in forty years' experience I cannot recall.

QUEEN

But, whatever he may want, he is not the leader of his Party.

BEACONSFIELD

Exactly! Your Majesty is, as always, unerring in your grasp of essentials. Mr. Gladstone is not the leader of the Liberals. That he sways the mob is unfortunate, but constitutionally of no importance. When the Liberals were in Opposition, he relinquished the leadership to Lord Hartington; now that the deluded voters have returned them to power,

it is Lord Hartington who must have the honour of being your Majesty's first Minister.

QUEEN

You mean I need not send for Mr. Gladstone?

BEACONSFIELD

You *must* not send for Mr. Gladstone. Whatever your personal feelings may be, the only right and constitutional course you can take is to send for Lord Hartington.

QUEEN

Then perhaps it won't be so bad!

BEACONSFIELD

Lord Hartington is a Conservative at heart—and a gentleman; neither of which, unhappily, can be said of Mr. Gladstone. You should, in my opinion, summon him immediately.

QUEEN

This afternoon?

BEACONSFIELD

Yes.

QUEEN

How is it best to open the subject with him?

BEACONSFIELD

Quite formally: "I wish to know whether you, as leader of the Opposition, will now undertake the administration of my affairs."

QUEEN

There are times, I know, when one *must* be formal. But surely I can say: "Leader of the Opposition, who have been the cause of the defeat of my Govern-

ment? ” I *ought* to say that. Then, if he is all you say, he will understand how I feel.

BEACONSFIELD

He cannot be so blind as not to understand.

QUEEN

Not everyone has your vision, my dear friend, yet what can be more cruel than for a female Sovereign, no longer young, severely tried, without a husband or any *one* person, now *you* are leaving me, I can trust, to have to take these people who have done all they can to vilify my Government? At least, I shall let them *know*.

BEACONSFIELD

As your Majesty pleases.

QUEEN

“ I wish to know whether you, as leader of the Opposition who have been the cause of the defeat of my Government, will now undertake the administration of my affairs.” That will express it.

BEACONSFIELD

If I may tender my last advice, I should suggest rather less emphasis—a slight, shall we say, neutrality.

QUEEN

Very well, Lord Beaconsfield, we will do our best.

BEACONSFIELD

And now, with your gracious permission, I must perform the most miserable duty of my life—take my leave of you. (*With difficulty the old man kneels and kisses her hand.*) Adieu, my Sovereign!

QUEEN

[*Raising him.*]

Good-bye, most faithful of servants and dearest of friends. But you *shan't* go like this. We shall *often* see each other. You must remember your promise. And here is a little token to remind you of it.

[*She gives him a bronze statuette of herself.*]

BEACONSFIELD

A bronze of your Majesty! Thank you, thank you. It shall always stand on my desk, as on Mr. Gladstone's there is a representation of me. Only where his is to fan a factious hatred, this shall stimulate, if it be possible, a reverent affection.

QUEEN

[*Giving him a group.*]

And this to remind you of Balmoral.

BEACONSFIELD

Brown and the pony and 'Sharp.' How *well* executed! Thank you, thank you again, most dear of mistresses.

QUEEN

[*Almost overcome with emotion.*]

Dear Lord Beaconsfield. (*As he bows himself out she murmurs to herself.*) Wicked of them—wicked—WICKED—

[*For a moment the lights go out, but come up immediately to reveal LORD HARTINGTON standing where BEACONSFIELD had been before the QUEEN.*]

This forty-nine-year-old marquis is the future DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, of whom legend reports that he once dreamed he was addressing the House of Lords and woke up to find that he was actually doing so! Even in these his earlier years cartoonists never

wearied of depicting him as somnolent, bored and lethargic. If GLADSTONE typified the lion, HARTINGTON, according to his biographer, was the elephant. He would, one feels, have been a most satisfactory and safe Premier from the QUEEN'S point of view. But his transparent sincerity, his loyalty and his good judgment make him, at least, know that it cannot be.

The worthy heir of a long line of aristocrats, his attitude to the QUEEN (and consequently hers to him) is in marked contrast to that of the Jewish adventurer, BEACONSFIELD, which we have just seen, and the descendant of Scottish yeoman, GLADSTONE, who, according to his son, "entered her presence with a reverence second only to his reverence in entering a church."

QUEEN

Lord Hartington, the Opposition having successfully appealed to the country to *turn out my Ministry*, I now wish to know whether you would undertake the administration of my affairs.

HARTINGTON

I am most sensible of the honour your Majesty does me, but I regret to say that there are insuperable difficulties.

QUEEN

Difficulties?

HARTINGTON

Yes, Ma'am.

QUEEN

And what are they, pray?

HARTINGTON

In a word, Mr. Gladstone!

QUEEN

I fail to see, Lord Hartington, how Mr. Gladstone is concerned in this. He is merely a member of the Party of which you are the Leader.

HARTINGTON

Not "merely," your Majesty. It would be evading the facts of the case to describe it so. Mr. Gladstone is—Mr. Gladstone. It is he, and he alone, to whom we owe our success at the Polls. I could not possibly form an administration without him, and I have no reason to think that he would consent to take office under me.

QUEEN

But you are the Leader of the Party—and one, I may say, who has been commended to me on account of his moderation. Mr. Gladstone has resigned.

HARTINGTON

If I may be so bold as to correct your Majesty, Mr. Gladstone *had* resigned. But his return to public life makes him once more the head of the Party, whoever may hold the title of Leader.

QUEEN

You mean you will not try to form a Government?

HARTINGTON

I mean I cannot. There is only one man who can do so—Mr. Gladstone.

QUEEN

No, *no!*

HARTINGTON

But, your Majesty, there is no statesman whose experience and abilities can be compared with his. Surely you cannot have any objection to him?

QUEEN

Only too many. Every speech he makes is an added objection.

HARTINGTON

But there is no one whose loyalty and personal devotion to you are more undoubted.

QUEEN

You can hardly expect me to believe that, after what he has been saying all over the country—*dreadful* things; things, Lord Hartington, of which I cannot believe that you approve.

HARTINGTON

In certain matters of Imperial policy, Ma'am, it is quite true that Mr. Gladstone and I are not entirely agreed. But, at the same time, I must remind you that when he was most warmly opposing the measures of the Government, he never wavered in his profound respect for yourself. That I can personally avouch. If you have been led to believe otherwise, your Majesty has been entirely misinformed.

QUEEN

I appreciate your defence of a colleague, Lord Hartington, but we will not have Mr. Gladstone as our Prime Minister.

HARTINGTON

But, your Majesty, what other course is there? I can assure you that no other colleague of mine will undertake to form a Government. And the country's verdict is decisive.

QUEEN

You have spoken to Mr. Gladstone on the matter?

HARTINGTON

No, not directly. But, as I said, I have every reason to believe that he would serve only as Prime Minister.

QUEEN

But there is a *possibility* that he would not?

HARTINGTON

All things are possible, Ma'am.

QUEEN

Then, Lord Hartington, you will please consult him to-day. You will inform him that I wish *you* to form a Government, and you will remind him that as he resigned from the leadership of the Liberals five years ago, he should be prepared now to serve loyally under you. He might be allowed the Home Office.

HARTINGTON

As your Majesty commands. But I should be failing in my duty if I did not remind you that facts are stronger than words. It is not Mr. Gladstone's written resignation five years ago that has to be considered, but his actual position to-day.

[*Again there is momentary darkness. The lights reveal MR GLADSTONE standing in LORD HARTINGTON's place.*]

QUEEN

Mr. Gladstone, the Opposition having turned out my Government, I sent for your Leader, Lord Hartington, who confessed his inability to form a Ministry and advised me to send for you. In summoning him in the first place, I believe I was acting in the spirit of the Constitution.

GLADSTONE

If I may presume to speak, nothing, in my view, could be more correct than Your Majesty's act.

QUEEN

Are you prepared to endeavour to form an administration?

GLADSTONE

As I dare not shrink from any duty I have incurred, I humbly accept your Majesty's commission.

QUEEN

Do you mean that you actually undertake to form a Government, or only that you will make the attempt?

GLADSTONE

As it is your Majesty's pleasure, I will actually undertake it. And the same considerations which make it my duty to accept office seem also to make it my duty to submit myself as Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury.

QUEEN

[Resigning herself to it.]

Very well, Mr. Gladstone. Have you thought of anyone for the War Office? That is *most* important.

GLADSTONE

With your Majesty's permission, that seems to be less important than the broad principles of statesmanship. At the moment, these centre in the India Office, and I am inclined to think Lord Hartington is eminently suitable to deal with them.

QUEEN

[*Delighted.*]

That is an excellent choice—an *excellent* choice. I entirely approve, and I hope that it means that in the matter of India and the Empire generally your action will be—conciliatory.

GLADSTONE

Everyone who has served the Crown, your Majesty, for even a much smaller term of years than I have knows that an incoming Government must recognise existing engagements. Irrespective of our own preferences, we shall take up whatever is required by the honour of the country.

QUEEN

I am glad to hear you say that, for I must be frank with you, and must in fairness say that there are certain expressions of yours that have given me great pain.

GLADSTONE

Your Majesty's well-known frankness is the main cause of the complete reliance of your Ministers upon you. May I ask what these expressions were?

QUEEN

Unfortunately they are too many to enumerate, but (*referring to a paper*) I believe that you said of Lord Beaconsfield's government—*my* government—that it set up "the doctrines of national self-interest and self-assertion as supreme laws." And, you added "if they harden into matters of principle, they will destroy all hope of a true public law for Christendom." You were correctly reported?

GLADSTONE

[*Grim.*]

Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN

And on another occasion you referred to our policy as "the slaughter of thousands of Zulus defending their homes," "the invasion of a free people in the Transvaal," "the disregard of the life in the hill villages of Afghanistan." And you even described Lord Beaconsfield's great vision of Imperialism as "the policy of denying to others the rights that we claim for ourselves." Is that correct?

GLADSTONE

It is, your Majesty.

QUEEN

But you must be aware that that is a *monstrous* perversion of the truth. Even in the heat of election, it is hardly allowable. You are speaking in the tones of an agitator, not of a statesman responsible for safeguarding my Empire.

GLADSTONE

I am sorry that your Majesty should consider it in that light.

QUEEN

How else can you expect me to consider it? We have our responsibilities in India and Africa. It is not our fault that, regrettably, we may have at times to sustain those responsibilities by punishment. You take too narrow a view, Mr. Gladstone: the view of a little England, not of a great Empire.

GLADSTONE

Since your Majesty has been kind enough to study some of my speeches, perhaps I might remind you of another which possibly was overlooked. In my last speech at Edinburgh I said that "whatever

we may say amidst the clash of arms and the din of preparation for warfare in time of peace, there is yet going on a profound movement that is bringing the nations of the civilised world nearer to one another and making them more and more responsible before God for one another's welfare. My one desire is to consider in all my public transactions these wider interests of mankind."

QUEEN

Mr. Gladstone, that is a most admirable sentiment; a very noble ideal; but hardly practical politics. And we are not a public meeting. !

GLADSTONE

I beg your Majesty's pardon. But I was endeavouring to explain in general terms why I shall advise your Majesty to announce in your Gracious Speech from the Throne our evacuation of Afghanistan.

QUEEN

Evacuate Afghanistan!

GLADSTONE

Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN

You are suggesting that I should order my troops to withdraw from Afghanistan? .

GLADSTONE

Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN

This is outrageous. I will never consent to it. You have just said that in spite of your prejudices you will take up whatever is required by the honour of the country.

GLADSTONE

But I do not consider that the occupation of Afghanistan is required by the honour of England.

QUEEN

If we withdraw, civil war will break out again and the country will be an easy prey for those wicked Russians to take on their way to India.

GLADSTONE

I think your Majesty sees the situation too darkly. Afghanistan is quite capable of managing her own affairs. Her real service to us is as an independent buffer state. Our army in occupation does not allay the hostility of our neighbours. It excites it.

QUEEN

That was *not* Lord Beaconsfield's judgment when the occupation was decided upon.

GLADSTONE

Naturally, Ma'am. But I would ask your Majesty to reflect that my predecessor's policy has already cost countless lives—English as well as native—and twenty million pounds. And it has done no good. Her Majesty in her royal speech will therefore announce the withdrawal.

QUEEN

No, Mr. Gladstone, she will not.

GLADSTONE

With the utmost deference, may I remind your Majesty that, constitutionally, her speech from the Throne is an expression of her Ministers' intentions?

QUEEN

Mr. Gladstone, if you are going to try to be a Bismarck, you will find that I am *not* an Emperor William to do *anything* you *order*. This audience is at an end.

CURTAIN

ACT II

MR. GLADSTONE'S room at No. 10 Downing Street, on a spring afternoon, some years later. GLADSTONE is pacing restlessly up and down and, when his WIFE enters, turns to her with obvious relief.

GLADSTONE

How is Lucy now?

CATHERINE

A little quieter, dear. They think she'll sleep.

GLADSTONE

She knows—everything?

CATHERINE

Yes, she's faced it. At first she couldn't realise Freddy was dead. She kept saying: "I know he'll live; he was so well; only I must go to him directly." It was pitiful. William, he wouldn't suffer much, would he?

GLADSTONE

They stabbed him to death—brutally.

[A pause.]

The Queen's written. (*He takes up a letter from his desk and reads it.*) "The Queen wishes to express her sincere sympathy with Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone in the loss of so dear a nephew and friend as Lord Frederick Cavendish was—in so horrible a manner——"

CATHERINE

Just like her, dear, to write at once. And she means it. She's so good and true.

GLADSTONE

[*Nods and continues to read.*]

"She has written to poor dear Lucy, for whom her heart bleeds—and whose anguish and misery in spite of courage and resignation she can but too well imagine."

CATHERINE

In your next audience, William, let her know what Lucy's courage really is.

GLADSTONE

I will indeed.

CATHERINE

But you don't know it yourself. Just as I was leaving her she said: "Tell Uncle William that he did right to send Freddy to Ireland."

GLADSTONE

Did right?

CATHERINE

Yes.

GLADSTONE

I meant to do right. He was a friend to Ireland and might have brought peace. But was it rightly done to send him to meet murderers in Phoenix Park?

CATHERINE

But you *couldn't* have foreseen, dear. No one could. You mustn't blame yourself, *ever*. Lucy said this, too: "I can give up even my husband if his death will work good to his fellow-men." Wouldn't he be proud of her?

GLADSTONE

[*Nodding and drawing CATHERINE to him.*]

And, with God's help, I'll see that the sacrifice wasn't in vain. Promise her that. You're going back to her?

CATHERINE

Yes. I think she'd like me to be there when she wakes up.

GLADSTONE

I'm sure she would.

CATHERINE

[*As she is at the door, about to go.*]

Oh, Hartington asked me to tell you that he's coming over to discuss affairs, as you arranged.

GLADSTONE

We can postpone that now.

CATHERINE

He's as brave as Lucy about it. I think he'd like you to go on with it, William, if you feel you can.

GLADSTONE

Of course. Don't forget to give her my love.

[*At the door CATHERINE blows a kiss to him. Then before she closes it, exclaims: "Lord Hartington!" and returns immediately with HARTINGTON, speaking to him:*]

CATHERINE

I didn't expect you quite so soon after me.

HARTINGTON

She's asleep, Mrs. Gladstone. Lady Louisa's still there. There was nothing I could do. So I came over.

GLADSTONE

It's good of you to think of settling down to routine this afternoon.

HARTINGTON

It's got to be done. And, anyhow, your loss is scarcely less than mine. Freddy was my brother, but we all know that you loved him like a son.

GLADSTONE

I did. And do.

[*A knock at the door.*]

Come in.

[*A SECRETARY with an envelope enters.*]

SECRETARY

A visitor is asking if he may speak to you on an important matter.

GLADSTONE

Has he an appointment?

SECRETARY

No.

GLADSTONE

I can't see him or anyone this afternoon.

SECRETARY

He said it was very urgent.

GLADSTONE

Who is he?

SECRETARY

He would not give his name. But he says his card is in this envelope.

GLADSTONE

[*Opening the envelope and reading the card.*]

Oh! Ask him to be kind enough to wait a moment. Then show him in when I ring.

SECRETARY

Yes.

[*SECRETARY goes out.*]

CATHERINE

Is it anyone important, William?

GLADSTONE

Mr. Parnell.

HARTINGTON

Parnell? Here?

GLADSTONE

Apparently.

HARTINGTON

But how can he dare?

CATHERINE

To-day of all days!

- HARTINGTON

But surely you're not going to see him?

GLADSTONE

But I must. If he has had the courage to come to see me, I can hardly refuse. Though you need not. Catherine, you look after him (*indicating HARTINGTON*) for a few moments, won't you? Chamberlain ought to be here any minute, too—but I expect he'd prefer your company. I won't be longer than is absolutely necessary.

[*They go out.*]

GLADSTONE *rings the bell. The SECRETARY announces "Mr. Parnell," and CHARLES STEWART PARNELL enters. He is not quite thirty-six, and is in an intensely emotional state. His usual mask of calm, somewhat cynical, detachment is thrown off. As his brother wrote of him at the time of the Phœnix Park murders: "It is certain that for once Charley completely lost his usual cool head and allowed his nervous temperament, which is as a rule kept strictly under control, to dominate him completely."*

GLADSTONE

Mr. Parnell, you take a very great risk in coming here to Downing Street.

PARNELL

It's nothing. I came in a closed cab. No one saw me. They all think I am at my hotel. But I had to see you personally.

GLADSTONE

Why?

PARNELL

To assure you, on my honour, that I am in no way responsible for this dastardly crime.

GLADSTONE

But I never supposed that you were.

PARNELL

Thank you.

GLADSTONE

After all, immediately before it happened you were in gaol, and when it happened you were meeting Davitt at Weymouth.

PARNELL

I mean, even indirectly responsible. The assassins are no followers of mine. And if murder is to be the way Ireland fights for her freedom, then I'll be her leader no longer. I am resigning my seat.

GLADSTONE

No!

PARNELL

I am leaving public life. I've told Davitt I'll not carry on an agitation for men who stab me in the back like this.

GLADSTONE

Your stab in the back, Mr. Parnell, is metaphorical only.

PARNELL

[Wildly.]

You need not remind me of Lord Frederick. Do you think I can forget him? And I've seen murdered men, Mr. Gladstone. Surely you can understand, sir, that I've come to you now to make the only restitution in my power—to give up my life's work to prove my sincerity!

GLADSTONE

I had no intention of wounding a sincerity of which I am convinced. I only want to remind you that my nephew has died—for Ireland no less than for England. And the only restitution any of us can make is to see that his blood was not spilt in vain. That is your task, Mr. Parnell, and mine.

PARNELL

Then you will not take vengeance?

GLADSTONE

[*Incredulous.*]
Vengeance?

PARNELL

The papers are full of it. The mobs are crying it in the streets.

GLADSTONE

You should know, as well as anyone, that Her Majesty's Government is not in the habit of consulting the wishes of mobs.

PARNELL

Then Ireland is to have justice at last?

GLADSTONE

As far as I can secure it. But I need your help.

PARNELL

How?

GLADSTONE

In the first place, you must not resign.

PARNELL

But how can I lead a movement with this stain on it—a movement it seems I can no longer control?

GLADSTONE

You must learn to. You are a young man, Mr. Parnell. When you reach my age, you will know that the real test of leadership is not in breaking the enemy's ranks, but in keeping one's own intact. If you resign, everything is lost. Weak or strong, you are Ireland's only responsible leader. If you go, no restraining influence will remain. Outrages, ~~like this murder~~, will increase. And no repressive measures on our part can prevent it.

PARNELL

Repression! Always repression! There's your fault. Give us freedom, and there will be no more outrages.

GLADSTONE

I intend to do so, if my life is spared so long. For it will take time.

PARNELL

Home Rule?

GLADSTONE

Yes, Ireland shall be denied nothing in self-government. But as I say, it will take time. England is not ready for such a step, and this murder may put the clock back ten years. We must be patient.

PARNELL

[*The Irish leader once more.*]

It is difficult for us in Ireland to be patient.

GLADSTONE

It is always difficult, but "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

PARNELL

I do not think you can realise what it is like there.

GLADSTONE

Can I not?

PARNELL

No. You read your official reports. But what can cold print tell you of the burning, living ferment? But I can tell you. I have seen it. I know. This murder—though God knows I would give my life to have it undone—is the answer to England's treatment. The inevitable answer. Do you know what the rule you have loosed on us has

done? Scores of women, decent women, innocent of any crime, put in solitary confinement, twenty-two hours out of twenty-four, months at a time; lads of ten arrested and ill-treated for whistling Irish songs; a little girl of twelve bayoneted by a constable because she was singing of freedom. These are everyday occurrences. I know, sir; I *know*.

GLADSTONE

It shall be put right.

PARNELL

And starvation and evictions over the whole country. Starvation—slow, hopeless death for hundreds of Irish, that your landlords may have more to spend on luxuries. As for evictions, even your Blue Books will tell you that if they were thousands in '77, they had trebled in two years.

GLADSTONE

That was Lord Beaconsfield's doing; not mine.

PARNELL

What matter, yours or his? In Ireland, we see it only as England's way.

GLADSTONE

It shall be changed. I have given you my word; and in return you *will* give me your patience?

PARNELL

As far as I can command men to whom patience is treachery.

GLADSTONE

You must command them. And I need not assure you, Mr. Parnell, how deeply I appreciate

both your visit and the honourable considerations which have prompted you to offer your resignation.

[PARNELL bows. GLADSTONE holds out his hand, which PARNELL takes. Then GLADSTONE rings the bell.]

I can reach you as usual through Mrs. O'Shea?

PARNELL

Yes.

GLADSTONE

Mr. Parnell.

PARNELL

Yes?

GLADSTONE

You realise fully, I am sure, that in matters such as these, which touch the welfare of millions, one's personal feelings are of no importance.

PARNELL

Of course.

GLADSTONE

In this matter, though we, who have most cause for grief, forgive Lord Frederick's murder, the mob, who are not at all concerned in it, howls, as you say, for vengeance.

PARNELL

There will be no more murders to hinder Ireland's cause.

GLADSTONE

Murder is not the only pitfall. The actions of all of us concerned in giving Ireland her freedom must be above the mob's reproach.

PARNELL

[Angrily.]

Are you doubting the sincerity of my principles, after all?

GLADSTONE

[With genuine feeling.]

No, not for a second.

PARNELL

[The mask resumed ; like ice.]

Then I do not understand you, Mr. Gladstone.

GLADSTONE

I think you do, Mr. Parnell.

*[The SECRETARY knocks and, on being given permission, enters.]*Will you please call a cab for this gentleman, and inform my guests that I am now at liberty. *(Bowling to PARNELL.)* Good day to you.

PARNELL

[Returning the bow.]

Good afternoon.

*[After he has gone, GLADSTONE sits for a moment with his head buried in his hands, before rising and steadying himself to meet HARTINGTON who enters, followed by JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN.**CHAMBERLAIN, at forty-six, is still a convinced and enthusiastic Radical, but the monocle and the orchid, which later became the stigmata of Imperialism, already distinguish him. He goes straight up to MR. GLADSTONE.]*

CHAMBERLAIN

~~I cannot say how terribly this has shocked me.~~
And also, I may add, Mr. Parnell. I have a letter from him for you.

HARTINGTON

-But——

GLADSTONE

[*Checking him with a look.*]
When was it given to you?

CHAMBERLAIN

O'Shea gave it to me this morning.

HARTINGTON

And where is Parnell at this moment?

CHAMBERLAIN

He is staying at the Westminster Palace Hotel. O'Shea tells me he does not consider it advisable to go out—at least for a day or two. Feeling is running rather high.

GLADSTONE

A very wise decision, I have no doubt.

CHAMBERLAIN

As you will see from the letter, to convince you that he had no part in the murder, he is offering his resignation.

HARTINGTON

You will, of course, accept it?

CHAMBERLAIN

Why? What good will it do? (*To GLADSTONE.*)
If I have any weight with you, sir—

GLADSTONE

Do you not think it would be wiser, at the moment, to postpone all discussion of Irish affairs? With this shadow over us, we can hardly hope that our judgments will be unimpassioned. Whether or not Mr. Parnell's resignation should be accepted can

better be discussed in full Cabinet on Wednesday. The question of the moment is Egypt.

CHAMBERLAIN

The questions do not differ vastly—repression in Ireland, oppression in Egypt. They're two facets of the same policy—Dizzy's.

HARTINGTON

Dizzy's in his grave, Chamberlain. Let him alone.

CHAMBERLAIN

We are struck down by his dead hand, all the same. What right have our troops in Egypt?

HARTINGTON

It's not a question of right, but expediency. Someone's got to keep order. The Egyptians can't; the Turks can't; the French won't; so there we are, whether we like it or not. (To GLADSTONE.) You agree, don't you?

GLADSTONE

You know, as well as I, that I accepted office to undo the mischief caused by Beaconsfield's foreign policy. I am, and shall remain, unalterably opposed to exploitation and aggression, whether it is on our own part or on anyone else's, whether in Egypt or in Ireland. We were all agreed on the action we took immediately over Afghanistan.

[He pauses and looks at them.]

CHAMBERLAIN

But——?

GLADSTONE

Exactly, Chamberlain. But Egypt is not Afghanistan. For good or evil we must consider the Canal. The Khedive's authority must be restored.

CHAMBERLAIN

In other words, you endorse Dizzy's principles?

GLADSTONE

Not his principles, though it may unfortunately be necessary to carry out, as a temporary measure and in a modified form, his policy. As soon as the Khedive's authority is restored, we shall withdraw the troops at once.

CHAMBERLAIN

After they have killed a few thousand Egyptians?

GLADSTONE

Let us pray that that may be avoided. I do not like it, I admit, but——

HARTINGTON

None of us like it, Chamberlain. It is an unfortunate necessity. But you Radicals are so impatient of necessity.

CHAMBERLAIN

That, may be, is because we do not possess Whig consciences.

GLADSTONE

Please, Chamberlain, this is an informal, friendly discussion, not an ordinary Cabinet meeting.

[*A knock. The SECRETARY enters with a letter, which he gives to GLADSTONE. He also says :*]

SECRETARY

General Gordon has arrived.

GLADSTONE

[*Nodding.*]
When I ring.

SECRETARY

[*Going out.*]
Yes.

GLADSTONE

[*To the others, as he opens the letter.*]
You will pardon me. Her Majesty.

HARTINGTON

I am sure that she will be gratified by the decision to remain in Egypt.

GLADSTONE

[*Looking up from the letter.*]

At the moment her mind is, not unnaturally, on Ireland. She hopes that we will take immediately stern and energetic repressive measures.

HARTINGTON

And shall we?

GLADSTONE

That, too, can surely wait for the Cabinet. As you heard, General Gordon is waiting on us. It seemed to me that, as we are discussing Egypt, we might see him on the matter of the Sudan.

CHAMBERLAIN

Why, specifically?

GLADSTONE

We are agreed that, for the time being, we must control Northern Egypt and Alexandria; but we have no reason ~~whatever~~ to keep our garrisons in the Sudan. To recall those will be evidence both of our own good faith and of our opposition to a ~~general~~ Imperialist policy. It ~~seems~~ there is only one man who will be generally acceptable to effect this withdrawal—Gordon. Hartington is in agreement with me in this.

HARTINGTON

With reservations.

GLADSTONE

We will see that Gordon remains under Baring's orders.

HARTINGTON

A man who's in the habit of consulting the Prophet Isaiah when he's in a difficulty, is not apt to obey anyone's orders——

GLADSTONE

Even if Gordon's preoccupation with religion is held against him in some quarters, I gather it does not make him any less acceptable to the Non-conformist, Chamberlain?

CHAMBERLAIN

In itself, no.

GLADSTONE

[*Ring the bell.*]

He is undoubtedly devout, though for myself I prefer that in a soldier to irreligion.

HARTINGTON

It's a matter of opinion. There's this to be said for the irreligious one: he's not likely to believe that he has personal orders from God instead of from his earthly superiors. But I agree we might as well use Gordon. The public trust him and, in an unpopular policy, that's half the battle.

[GENERAL GORDON is announced, and enters, walking in his hurried, tripping steps. He is fifty years old, "a short, unprepossessing, timid-looking man." His eyes, "like blue-diamonds," redeem him and, in their frank innocence, give a clue to his dauntless personality. He bows to the STATESMEN, and they to him.]

GLADSTONE

It is good of you, General Gordon, to make this visit at such short notice.

GORDON

I live prepared.

GLADSTONE

You cannot be unaware of the reasons for which we have asked you to meet us.

GORDON

[*Smiling.*]

The papers, unfortunately, have been too full of my name for me to pretend ignorance.

GLADSTONE

We are of one mind with the newspapers and the people. There is no one whose experience and past records make him fitter than yourself to deal with the situation in Egypt.

GORDON

I have had some little experience there.

GLADSTONE

If we told you that Her Majesty's Government has decided to evacuate the British garrisons from the Sudan, would it surprise you?

GORDON

No.

GLADSTONE

In your opinion, can this be done so as in no way to alarm the population there?

GORDON

Yes.

HARTINGTON

By you?

GORDON

Yes. Though it would be more certain if I could first make a preliminary survey.

GLADSTONE

That would, I think, be quite acceptable to Her Majesty's Government. You could go, for instance, in the first place, to Suakin and report from there?

GORDON

Yes.

CHAMBERLAIN

General Gordon, you, ~~of necessity~~, know more of the actual conditions in Egypt than is possible for us. What is your personal opinion of the Sudan, as it affects us?

GORDON

The Sudan always was, and always will be, useless to us. The sacrifice to ensure good government there is altogether too great.

GLADSTONE

By that do I understand that you are not only prepared to act on the Government's behalf, but that you are, personally, in sympathy with a policy of withdrawal?

GORDON

Yes, that is so. But may I make a request?

GLADSTONE

Certainly.

GORDON

You may have heard that in those parts I have devoted my life to making an end of slavery. After

I have secured for you the evacuation of our garrisons from the Sudan, may I be permitted to proceed to the Congo to fight slavery at its source?

GLADSTONE

At the moment I can see no objection to that. But we must take one thing at a time.

GORDON

Of course. But the Sudan presents no difficulty.

HARTINGTON

None?

GORDON

None worth speaking of.

GLADSTONE

I am glad to hear that. Detailed instructions can, of course, be sent to you only after the official consent of the Cabinet as a whole is secured. But I think I am right in saying (*with a look he interrogates the others, who reply with a nod*), I am sure I am right in saying that I anticipate no dissension. You are quite clear, General Gordon, as to the nature of your mission?

GORDON

Quite clear. I am to proceed to Suakin, from where I am to report on the state of the Sudan and the probable effect of our withdrawal. On receipt of further instructions, I am to evacuate all our garrisons, causing as little alarm as possible. By this action it will be understood that Her Majesty's Government will no longer take responsibility for the territory.

GLADSTONE

Exactly.

[The lights are lowered for a moment to denote the passage of some months. When they come up again,

the three men, GLADSTONE, HARTINGTON and CHAMBERLAIN, are seen in consultation once more. It is the morrow of the receipt of the news in England of the fall of Khartoum and the death of GENERAL GORDON.]

CHAMBERLAIN

[*At the window.*]

And what now?

HARTINGTON

It looks to me as if it may be necessary for us to resign. Gordon's death has given the Tories a cry to rouse the country.

CHAMBERLAIN

The country's roused without that. It's been at fever heat for months. Now the lid's off. Listen to them.

[*We can hear in the distance the mob's cries: "Down with Gladstone!" "Murderer!" "Who killed Gordon?"*]

HARTINGTON

[*To GLADSTONE.*]

What are you going to do?

GLADSTONE

In what connection?

HARTINGTON

Gordon's death.

GLADSTONE

Apart from the further policy we have agreed on, nothing. What is there that can be done?

CHAMBERLAIN

The truth might be told.

GLADSTONE

Why? Whom would it benefit?

HARTINGTON

I don't think you quite realise the extent of the damage this has done to you personally.

GLADSTONE

I think I do. Gordon, dying there in the desert, cut off from aid and England—it's a ghost against me. Another one.

CHAMBERLAIN

It's worse than a ghost. It may well cripple your power for any other measures now.

GLADSTONE

I am not unaware of that. It is impossible to be so. Even the Queen has telegraphed her personal disapproval and she has neglected to use cypher.

HARTINGTON

Telegraphed *en clair*?

GLADSTONE

Yes. "These¹ news from Khartoum are frightful, and to think this might have been prevented and many precious lives saved by earlier action is too frightful."

CHAMBERLAIN

That—not in code! So that every telegraph boy can gossip that the Queen blames the Government. It's monstrous! Without precedent. Won't even that turn you republican?

GLADSTONE

No.

CHAMBERLAIN

. But you'll do something about it, surely?

GLADSTONE

[*Weightily; giving every word its ironic value.*]

I shall do no more than say that, though I do not presume to estimate the means of judgment possessed by her Majesty, I am not altogether able to follow the conclusion she has been pleased thus to announce.

CHAMBERLAIN

She must know as well as we do that, if it hadn't been for the incompetence of the military experts, the expedition would have been in time to save Gordon.

HARTINGTON

Possibly. But she could still argue that if we'd sent the expedition when it was first suggested, there would have been a margin of time to cover even that incompetence. No, Chamberlain, that won't do. We ought to have sent earlier. I always said so. We're to blame for Gordon's death.

CHAMBERLAIN

No.

HARTINGTON

I'm afraid so. As an Englishman, it makes me ashamed.

CHAMBERLAIN

Are you one of the mob, too?

GLADSTONE

[*Sharply.*]

Chamberlain!

CHAMBERLAIN

You don't agree with him?

GLADSTONE

[After a short pause.]

Yes.

CHAMBERLAIN

What——!

GLADSTONE

Not for his reasons. Gordon was a hero, a hero of heroes. And we ought to have known that a hero of heroes is not the proper person to send to Egypt to carry out the orders of us very ordinary men.

HARTINGTON

It needed a hero there, I should have thought.

GLADSTONE

No. For he claimed a hero's privilege.

CHAMBERLAIN

What do you mean?

GLADSTONE

Of over-riding every law but that of his own nature. He turned upside down and inside out every idea and intention with which he left England. He was sent to evacuate the Sudan; for that purpose only; he knew that and accepted that. Once there, he played Beaconsfield's game and tried to conquer it. We meant peace; he took a sword. When I answer for this matter at the bar of my conscience, my fault, as I see it, is not that we did so little to rescue him, but that we did too much—that we risked too many other lives for one who, in plain language, betrayed his trust.

HARTINGTON

Death alters perspectives.

GLADSTONE

I know. And it pays all reckonings. That lonely death will live when we are forgotten. Gordon is a hero for ever.

CHAMBERLAIN

But to-day?

GLADSTONE

Silence. That is the only tribute we can give. One day men will know the truth; but not from us.
[In the silence can be heard the crowd singing snatches of songs:]

“Too late, too late to save him;
Too late in vain we tried;
Fighting for England’s glory,
A hero’s death he died”

and, as a vindictive refrain:

“Through the folly of the Grand Old Man.”]

CHAMBERLAIN

[Moodily turning from the window.]

That Jingo mob would never accept the truth even if they were told.

GLADSTONE

[Contemptuous.]

Is there any need that they should? *(A change of manner, as if he were wiping the whole matter from his mind.)* Now, gentlemen, we cannot undo the past; but there is the great matter of the future.

CHAMBERLAIN

I thought we had agreed to do nothing more about Egypt.

GLADSTONE

I am speaking of Ireland.

HARTINGTON

What have you decided?

GLADSTONE

I have considered it very deeply in all its bearings. I have weighed every argument and objection, and I have determined to announce to the Cabinet that the first item on our programme is to be Home Rule for Ireland.

CHAMBERLAIN

and

HARTINGTON

[*Together.*]

No—no.

GLADSTONE

Both Whig and Radical against it?

HARTINGTON

You know I am unalterably opposed to any measure which will weaken the Union.

GLADSTONE

And you?

CHAMBERLAIN

I object for various reasons.

GLADSTONE

May I know them?

CHAMBERLAIN

In the first place, to put Irish politics in the forefront of the programme is to delay social justice for the poor of England.

GLADSTONE

Not necessarily.

CHAMBERLAIN

Inevitably. The country's not ready to give Ireland Home Rule. That means you'll be defeated and the Tories'll get in. And *they're* likely to legislate in the interests of the masses, aren't they?

GLADSTONE

You are assuming that I cannot carry Home Rule through.

CHAMBERLAIN

I am.

GLADSTONE

Why not?

CHAMBERLAIN

With that rabble (*pointing to the window*) roused on a new cry—Hartington's cry of disruption of the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, betrayal of the country's interests? You'll go with the Tories, won't you, Hartington?

HARTINGTON

I shall take whatever course I believe to be consistent with England's honour.

CHAMBERLAIN

Or with the interests of your own class?

GLADSTONE

Chamberlain, please!

HARTINGTON

You're an odd fellow, Chamberlain. With one breath you say your first principle is benefiting the poor; and with the next you sneer at them as a gullible mob.

CHAMBERLAIN

If they're that—and many of them are—it's because you damned Whigs haven't given them a chance to be anything else.

GLADSTONE

[*Thundering.*]

The subject, gentlemen, is Home Rule for Ireland. Why should you assume, Chamberlain, that I cannot carry it with Parnell's help?

CHAMBERLAIN

That's my second objection. You trust Parnell.

GLADSTONE

I do.

CHAMBERLAIN

I don't. Not an inch. Parnell's playing for his own hand, too.

GLADSTONE

Mr. Parnell is working for Ireland. So am I. Together we shall give her justice at last.

CHAMBERLAIN

At the expense of England.

GLADSTONE

How could that be? A happy and prosperous Ireland will surely be of greater benefit to us than a land coerced and sullen with hatred.

HARTINGTON

A land stained by murder and outrage.

GLADSTONE

Whose fault?

CHAMBERLAIN

Parnell's.

GLADSTONE

I have reason to believe otherwise.

CHAMBERLAIN

That does not affect my objection. I believe Parnell to be untrustworthy. He has influence only because he's the channel for subscriptions from Irish servant-girls in America. The Irish Party is a kept party. And you yield to their clamour. To please them, you propose, in fact, to use millions of English money and to increase taxation to buy Ireland for them. If that money were to be spent to keep the ties between England and Ireland closer, Hartington would be with you. Am I not right?

[HARTINGTON *nods*.]

If the money were to be spent on bettering the working classes of England, I and every Radical would be with you for taxation to the limit—and beyond. You know that. But to pour out English money as blackmail to Parnell's gang—no!

GLADSTONE

Does it not occur to you, Chamberlain, that, on your argument, nothing would ever be begun? The landlords will have to be bought out sometime. Why not now? And can even a slight increase in English taxation repay Ireland the wrongs England has done her in the name of Beaconsfieldism?

HARTINGTON

England and Ireland should be one. This isn't a question of Imperialism.

GLADSTONE

Ireland was conquered, as India was conquered.

HARTINGTON

That was a long time ago.

GLADSTONE

Then the debt has had longer to accumulate.

HARTINGTON

You're too logical. Reason isn't any good in politics.

GLADSTONE

It has a way of winning the last trick, even if we don't live to play it.

CHAMBERLAIN

[*Impatient.*]

May I put a direct question?

GLADSTONE

Of course.

CHAMBERLAIN

Under the Home Rule plan, will Irish representation cease at Westminster?

GLADSTONE

Yes.

CHAMBERLAIN

Then I shall resign.

GLADSTONE

Why?

CHAMBERLAIN

I have told you. It will be a complete capitulation to Parnell; and such an issue will divert the country for years, while we must wait and whistle for reforms to our own people.

GLADSTONE

I hope you will think further before you take so disruptive a step. There are many points to be threshed out in more detail.

CHAMBERLAIN

But you are immovable on *that* point?

GLADSTONE

Yes.

CHAMBERLAIN

Then so am I on resignation.

HARTINGTON

And I also, I fear. You will understand I do so with the greatest reluctance, but there is no other course consistent with my honour.

GLADSTONE

I feared it would be so with you, Hartington.

CHAMBERLAIN

The Whigs have always done Tory work in Liberal uniform.

GLADSTONE

Be careful, Chamberlain, that you don't end up as a Tory too!

CHAMBERLAIN

That is as unlikely as your being able to carry the Bill.

GLADSTONE

We shall see. You will offer your resignations formally at the Cabinet to-morrow?

CHAMBERLAIN

Yes.

'HARTINGTON

I shall be unfortunately compelled to do so.

CHAMBERLAIN

The Queen will accept mine, at least, with considerable equanimity.

GLADSTONE

But you must believe that I shall not. (*Instinctively orating to cover his feelings.*) I need not tell you both how deeply I am affected by your decisions, the more ~~so as~~ I know you are actuated by the highest of principles. It is the misfortune of politics that we are so divided, and divided each in honesty. To you it seems a betrayal of England's need and England's honour to allow self-government to Ireland; to me, it seems a betrayal of England's honour not to do so. We have reached a place where further argument is useless. Only the future can judge between us. To lose you is like losing both my arms, but I must go on as best I can without them. Good-bye.

[*They both shake his hand and go out. For a moment he stands alone, crushed. Then he rings the bell for his SECRETARY, who enters. He does not immediately notice him.*]

SECRETARY

Yes, Mr. Gladstone.

[*Outside the crowd suddenly cheers, then boos.*]

GLADSTONE

[*On the cheer.*]

That must be Hartington——

[*On the boo.*]

And that's Chamberlain.

SECRETARY

They know who's been on which side in this Gordon matter.

GLADSTONE

I suppose they do, Eddy; but there's more they don't know. Is Mrs. Gladstone in?

SECRETARY

Yes, she came in about ten minutes ago.

GLADSTONE

Would you ask her if she could spare a moment?

SECRETARY

Yes, Mr. Gladstone.

[SECRETARY goes out, while GLADSTONE stands listening to the crowds repeating "The folly of the Grand Old Man." A stone hits the window. CATHERINE, still in her outdoor clothes, comes in.]

CATHERINE

What is it, dear?

GLADSTONE

Hartington's gone.

CATHERINE

Where?

GLADSTONE

Resigned.

CATHERINE

Harty-Tarty resigned?

GLADSTONE

And Chamberlain.

CATHERINE

William, what have you been doing?

GLADSTONE

Ireland.

CATHERINE

Is it worth losing them for that?

GLADSTONE

It was worth Freddy dying for. We owe recompense to him and thousands more.
[Another stone hits the window.]

CATHERINE

Hadn't we better close the shutters?

GLADSTONE

They'll get tired of it. Gordon's dead, too.

CATHERINE

It's dreadful, but you mustn't let that distress you.

GLADSTONE

I can't help it distressing me. (*Vehemently.*) But I was right, Catherine. Because of Gordon there will be ten thousand more graves in Egypt.

CATHERINE

Yes, dear.

GLADSTONE

I'm sure I'm right.

CATHERINE

Of course.

GLADSTONE

So I must go on, even if it's quite alone.

CATHERINE

[Her arm through his.]

Not alone—ever.

[GLADSTONE draws her to him. A stone crashes through the window and falls on the floor.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

At Hawarden again. The room is very little changed from when we first saw it, except that the curtains are drawn. It is the end of February 1894.

GLADSTONE is writing, and we can tell, from the closeness with which he peers at his manuscript, how his sight has failed. The slight increase in loudness in CATHERINE'S voice also indicates his deafness.

CATHERINE

You're sure, William, that it's wise to try your eyes quite so long? You've been at Horace nearly an hour now.

GLADSTONE

[*Surprised.*]

As long as that? Perhaps I'd better put it by for the moment. Besides Morley ought to be here any time now.

CATHERINE

Anything important?

GLADSTONE

No.

CATHERINE

But it's really the end this time, isn't it?

GLADSTONE

I'm afraid so. You won't be very disappointed?

CATHERINE

Of course not.

every other minute to get one and then throwing it is too hard work on the hill.

CATHERINE

I'll see to it, dear. But even you *and* Petz can't put me off like that.

GLADSTONE

I wasn't trying to put you off.

CATHERINE

Weren't you, indeed? You know what Parnell said?

GLADSTONE

Parnell said a great many things.

CATHERINE

I mean about you.

GLADSTONE

So do I.

CATHERINE

Not politically, dear. When he was staying here with us. You know Mary asked him who he thought was our best actor and he said you.

GLADSTONE

Did he indeed? He had a certain talent in that direction himself. ~~—~~

CATHERINE

You're not still upset about him? And now he's dead I feel so sorry for her, poor thing! Think, William, if we hadn't found each other at the beginning, it might have been us.

GLADSTONE

Catherine, you know I never have said and never will say one word of judgment on that matter. All that concerns me is that it has wrecked the cause of Ireland for who knows how long? Everything was in our grasp. Not even the Lords and the Queen could have withstood us. And Parnell threw it to the winds for Mrs. O'Shea. It is not my province to judge him for that. I hope he found happiness. But I had to think of Ireland, even though he failed us. And, as things were, I had to go on without him.

CATHERINE

I know, dear. And now the Lords have thrown out the Bill, and things are as bad as ever for Ireland.

GLADSTONE

Yes. Hartington—that is to say, Devonshire—

CATHERINE

No, he'll always be Harty-Tarty, even if he is sleeping in the Lords.

GLADSTONE

He woke up to move the rejection of the Bill. I'm not sure that Chamberlain wasn't right about the Whigs.

CATHERINE

He's not been particularly polite lately.

GLADSTONE

That's nothing.

CATHERINE

You're forgiving.

GLADSTONE

Chamberlain's wronged Ireland, but not me. They've been too strong for us.

CATHERINE

That's not the reason?

GLADSTONE

No, Catherine, I've told you. It's just that I've become an old man who can't see or hear very well.

CATHERINE

Last time I saw the Queen, she said she couldn't think why you made such a fuss about Ireland, which was a dreadful place not fit even for holidays.

GLADSTONE

She's decided to go to Naples. Did I tell you?

CATHERINE

Poor dear! I *do* hope it'll do her good. I thought she looked as if she needed a change. Naples . . . Do you remember, William, last time—how they cheered? It was almost like being in England.

GLADSTONE

Italy would have been very different if Cavour had lived. (*A sigh.*) But, then, ideals in politics are never realised. One ought to have learnt that by now. Still, one has been able to do a little for Italian freedom. My name does still stand for something in Europe, doesn't it?

CATHERINE

Of course.

GLADSTONE

That makes it more necessary.

CATHERINE

Makes what necessary?

GLADSTONE

Nothing—nothing. I was only thinking of politics—how intricate it all is. It's even more difficult to find one's way out of the maze than it was to find one's way in. You'll miss it.

CATHERINE

Not now. Twenty years ago, yes. But I'm getting old too, William.

GLADSTONE

No one would think it by the way you persist in *running* upstairs.

CATHERINE

Habit, dear. Like living with you. Though it's never grown stale. You know, I think things would have been very different with you and the Queen if Albert had lived.

GLADSTONE

Do you? (*Grimly.*) Albert would certainly have prevented the disaster of Dizzy.

CATHERINE

I know you think it's Dizzy. But the heart's a curious thing—and there are so many kinds of jealousy.

GLADSTONE

That's something you ought to know nothing about.

CATHERINE

From experience, no. (*Laughing infectiously at her recollection.*) Oh, William, do you remember when the Duchess felt it her duty to warn me that you'd been seen walking up Whitehall with one of those unfortunate women? I shall never forget her face when I told her that you were bringing her to Downing Street so that I could help her. Ever since, she's thought we were both a little mad.

GLADSTONE

You could always tell the Duchess's thought by the motives she ascribed to other people. Quite transparent.

[*A knock.*]

Ah, here's Morley. Come in.

MAID

Mr. John Morley, sir.

GLADSTONE

Show him in at once.

[*JOHN MORLEY enters and greets them.*]

CATHERINE

Good evening. I'm so glad you've come. [for a game of backgammon with him.]

MORLEY

[*Surprised.*]

Backgammon?

CATHERINE

Yes, it'll be very good for him to have a game. It'll rest his eyes and take his mind off Westminster.

[*As she gets the board and places it between the two men, she continues talking to MORLEY.*]

You've come over immediately and haven't even waited to change. I'm sure you're soaked.

MORLEY

No, I assure you.

GLADSTONE

Do make yourself comfortable, Morley. You can reverse Wordsworth's process.

MORLEY

What was that? You haven't told me.

GLADSTONE

It was the days when he used to dine with me in the Albany. When he was leaving he always used to change his silk stockings in the ante-room and put on grey worsted.

CATHERINE

That was very careful of him, dear; so like some of his poetry, too.

GLADSTONE

That's rather hard. One should be grateful for even the lesser Wordsworth when one is living in an age that has produced young Mr. Kipling.

CATHERINE

[To MORLEY.]

By the way, did you see Russell's remark "Love of power is the second characteristic of Mr. Gladstone"?

MORLEY

I did. And reprehended it. It was notably untrue.

GLADSTONE

I hope so, indeed. I think it is. But it's so difficult to know oneself. I am not even sure now that I *want* to resign.

MORLEY

None of us in the Cabinet want you to. You know that.

GLADSTONE

Yes, you are very patient with me.

CATHERINE

Is his deafness really so bad?

MORLEY

No.

CATHERINE

[*To* GLADSTONE.]

Now what have you to say?

GLADSTONE

Morely's just being polite. (*Handing the dice box to him.*) Will you throw?

MORLEY

[*Doing so.*]

Three.

GLADSTONE

[*Throwing.*]

Five. I'll take that. (*He moves.*) Five and three. There's a certain satisfaction in a safe move, even if it's only backgammon.

CATHERINE

I'll leave you to your game. (*To* MORLEY, *ambiguously.*) I hope you beat him. He shouldn't have his own way all the time.

MORLEY

[*As he holds the door for her.*]
I'll do my best.

[*As he closes the door behind her.*]
You want to play?

GLADSTONE

Yes, why not? Your throw.

MORLEY

[*Throwing.*]
Six and five. (*He moves.*)

GLADSTONE

I always think that's a risky move.

MORLEY

Best in the circumstances.

[*The game continues in a desultory fashion at the beginning of the following conversation, but before the end both men are too absorbed in the political argument to continue it.*]

MORLEY

You are set on resignation?

GLADSTONE

Unalterably.

MORLEY

But not for the reason you are giving.

GLADSTONE

Let us put it like this. My failing sight and hearing are a sufficient cause. No one can question it, not even the Queen. It will be universally accepted in the country.

MORLEY

But it's not a cause. It's an excuse.

GLADSTONE

Catherine suspects that. I suppose I shall have to tell her in the end. But let's call it a pretext. I've invented or pretended nothing. It's true that if the Cabinet were not against me on this naval question, I might hold on a little longer, in spite of my handicaps. But that is a matter which concerns no one but myself.

MORLEY

Her Majesty knows nothing of your views.

GLADSTONE

Naturally not. Nor will anyone but you. As Prime Minister I have merely told the Queen that the Cabinet will propose an unprecedented increase in the Navy Estimate, and she has assured me that she is very glad to hear it. She says it is *right* and absolutely *necessary* for the *safety* of the Empire. Much underlined, of course.

MORLEY

She's by no means alone in her ideas.

GLADSTONE

Naturally. But at eighty-three *I* am not learning how to bow the knee to jingoism.

MORLEY

But you yourself have sanctioned increase of armaments in the past.

GLADSTONE

Only when special and immediate circumstances

demanded it. To-day there are none. We are at peace. And there is no vestige of excuse for increasing our forces unless war is likely. There is only one reason for taking such a course—the desire for dominance. And there is only one outcome—war.

MORLEY

But you must admit that many competent judges do not think so.

GLADSTONE

The only competent judge, Morley, is the future. And I shan't be here to know his verdict; though you may. I can only say that, in my opinion, the policy of piling up arms in time of peace is mad and drunk. As my own Cabinet and the country do not think so, I can do nothing to prevent it. But I can refuse to be a party to it. So I shall resign.

MORLEY

If you consider the danger so great, will it be lessened by your absence at the head of affairs?

GLADSTONE

This thing lies too deep for debating points. But I think so.

MORLEY

How?

GLADSTONE

I have come to be considered, unworthily it may be, not only as an English but as a European statesman. My name stands in Europe as a symbol of peace and non-aggression. And I believe that the situation would be even more dangerous than it is if it could be interpreted abroad that *I* was

plunging England into this whirlpool of aggressive militarism.

MORLEY

But you could make it clear, with all your authority, that we are arming only to defend our own and to keep the peace.

GLADSTONE

[*Surprised and a little angry.*]

Morley, do I appear so senile that you are mistaking me for the lunatic electorate? If so many announced her intention to dominate Europe by arms in the cause of peace, should we allow them?

MORLEY

No, I suppose not.

GLADSTONE

You *suppose* not? You know not. Why, then, should we expect them to allow us? If we arm, everyone arms; and the end of that is war.

MORLEY

Aims do not necessarily mean war.

GLADSTONE

Not *necessarily*, of course. But, in point of fact, they have done from the beginning of time, and I see no reason to suppose that they will not to the end. As far as I am concerned, I have opposed militarism for sixty-two and a half years. Now it has triumphed. It's the monster hatched from the egg of Dizzy's Imperialism. He's beaten me at the end. But that's no reason why I should become his ally in wickedness. Next week I shall tender my

resignation to the Queen. . . . Now, let us finish the game. It's your throw, I think.

MORLEY

No. Yours.

[*They continue playing. There is a moment's darkness, during which the curtain falls. When the lights come up again, we are in the House of Commons listening to MR. GLADSTONE'S last speech. He is addressing us directly. There is no trace of the weakness of age in the last tremendous effort of the orator.*]

GLADSTONE

And, sir, I would further say this. I believe history and posterity will consign to disgrace the name and memory of every man, be he who he may, that, having the power to aid in an equitable settlement between Ireland and Great Britain, has used that power not to aid, but to prevent it. The Irish Bill occupied this House for more than a hundred days. We meet here at the end of the longest session in the history of this House. We have, at the end of years of the most bitter controversy, passed what the majority deems beneficial legislation, giving to Ireland a measure of that freedom we have too long withheld, but which we have no right to deny her. And with what result? The House of Lords incontinently throws out the Bill.

The question, then, is whether the House of Lords is to be allowed to annihilate thus the whole work of the House of Commons and the will of the country. I feel it my duty to state what appear to me to be indisputable facts. The issue is between a deliberative assembly, elected by the votes of more than six million people, and those who occupy an hereditary Chamber.

The issue has been postponed, long postponed. But I am afraid, sir, that the epoch of postponement has gone by. It is not with this House to pronounce judgment, for it is itself a party to the case. But there is a higher authority than the House of Commons—the authority of the nation. And the nation, I believe, will demand a change.

I do not like changes for their own sake. I only like change when it is needful to alter something bad into something good. That is the basis of my liberalism. I am a lover of liberty, and that liberty which I value for myself, I value for every human being. It is because of this that I have striven to the best of my ability to labour for the advantage of the people. All the people. For this key of liberty unlocks every door. If we as Englishmen care greatly for freedom, we shall be in no doubt as to our course, whatever the particular question. We shall resist tyranny if it is shown by a great nation to a smaller; by hereditary wealth to elected talent; by a strong power to a weaker dependency; by a militarist threat to a peaceful world. Egypt, Ireland, what you will—all are in this. And though there are moments, as this one, when the cause of liberty may seem on all sides to suffer eclipse and the forces of tyranny reign triumphant, yet this freedom is the cause of the future, and to-morrow, though we may not live to see it, will vindicate yesterday's labour and to-day's faith.

You cannot fight against the future. The great social forces that move onward in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our debates cannot impede or disturb, are marshalled on our side. The banner which we now carry in this fight, though at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, will soon again float in the eye of Heaven, and will be borne in the hands of the

united people, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and to a not-far-distant victory.

[BLACK OUT.]

The light comes up on the audience chamber in Windsor Castle once more. The most noticeable change in the room is an enormous portrait of Beaconsfield. GLADSTONE is sitting under it, talking to SIR HENRY PONSONBY, the Queen's private secretary.]

GLADSTONE

Her Majesty is acquainted with the reason for my request?

PONSONBY

Certainly, and I can assure you that she regrets the necessity as much as I do.

GLADSTONE

No, Sir Henry. I am a very old man, so I can exercise the privilege of being quite frank with you. The Queen will most certainly not regret my resignation.

PONSONBY

She is deeply sympathetic with the cause of it.

GLADSTONE

[*Not quite hearing.*]
The—

PONSONBY

.. The cause of it.

GLADSTONE

My deafness? But that is such a very little thing.

PONSONBY

Mr. Gladstone, if a comparatively young man may answer your candour with an equal sincerity,

I should like to tell you now, how much your great services to England have been appreciated. They are beyond the reach of conventional thanks.

GLADSTONE

That is very good of you

PONSONBY

And in saying this, I am sure I speak also for Her Majesty.

GLADSTONE

[*Shortly.*]

I am glad that you should be of that opinion.

PONSONBY

And for the majority of Her Majesty's subjects.

GLADSTONE

It has been my endeavour to serve their interests.

PONSONBY

And if there is any matter in which I can still be of service to you in the future, you have only to mention it.

GLADSTONE

Thank you, Sir Henry. I have served the Queen for over fifty years, and I have observed many of my colleagues in that service. You will forgive me for saying that in you there is a combination of qualities I have found nowhere else and cannot hope to see again. ~~The Queen is very fortunate. Sometimes I wish I had your secret of dealing with her.~~

PONSONBY

The office of secretary is hardly to be compared with that of first Minister.

GLADSTONE

Even so, there are times when—— (*he sighs*) Once in Sicily I made a journey for two or three weeks on the back of a mule. It was a good beast; it was patient and served me excellently. I ought to have become attached to it. And yet I could not get up the slightest shred of feeling for the brute. I could not even like it. . . . A Prime Minister, Sir Henry, can be his Sovereign's mule.

[*There is a moment's silence between the men, but we are in no doubt that PONSONBY agrees with the diagnosis. Then the courtier speaks.*]

PONSONBY

I think you view the situation too darkly.

GLADSTONE

These eyes may be nearly blind, but not one's other eyes. Still, I have one satisfaction. I know I have done nothing, either by wilfulness or neglect, to aggravate the situation.

PONSONBY

I am sure you have not.

GLADSTONE

And fifty-three years is a long spell.

[*PONSONBY nods sympathetically.*]

It was at Claremont I was sworn Privy Councillor. September the eighth, '41. That was about the time when he (*indicating the portrait of BEACONSFIELD*) was busy betraying his leader. . . . My resignation will give the Queen much to consider. She will doubtless consider my advice of some value in the choice of my successor.

PONSONBY

I am afraid I am not in a position to know her mind on that subject—except in so far as you and I have discussed it ourselves.

GLADSTONE

Of course not. Of course not. But it would be usual. And I cannot think she would wish to slight me at my last audience.

PONSONBY

[*Quickly.*]

One thing she has mentioned very definitely.

GLADSTONE

What is that?

PONSONBY

She hopes that the business connected with your resignation will be concluded as quickly as possible so that it does not interfere with her holiday.

GLADSTONE

[*Thinking his deafness has betrayed him.*]

Her——

PONSONBY

Her holiday. She wants to leave on Tuesday week for Italy and she is afraid the change of leadership may alter her plans.

GLADSTONE

[*Drily.*]

I trust we shall be able to avoid that inconvenience.

[*THE QUEEN enters. She, too, has aged much, but she is now exuberantly cheerful at the prospect of at last getting rid of this "wild, incomprehensible old man."* PONSONBY bows and retires.]

QUEEN

You may be seated, Mr. Gladstone.

GLADSTONE

Thank you, Ma'am. (*He does so again.*) Your Majesty is already acquainted with my reason for seeking this audience.

QUEEN

We are.

GLADSTONE

My sight and hearing no longer permit me to discharge efficiently the duties of the high office with which your Majesty has entrusted me for the fourth time; so I am taking leave formally to tender my resignation. I have delivered the letter to General Ponsonby.

QUEEN

It will be our duty, Mr. Gladstone, to accept that. But I should like to tell you how truly sorry I am—for the ailments which have made it necessary. (*She emphasises the distinction.*)

GLADSTONE

At eighty-three one can expect no less.

QUEEN

No, indeed. I myself am feeling very worn out these days, but I am hoping that the Italian sun will benefit me.

GLADSTONE

We all trust so.

QUEEN

The weather has been very trying, do you not think?

GLADSTONE

It has certainly not been pleasant.

QUEEN

So cold and damp—and those dreadful fogs.

GLADSTONE

Yes. Though I was fortunate enough to enjoy a little respite at Biarritz. I can hope that your Majesty will find similar weather at Naples.

QUEEN

You know Naples well?

GLADSTONE

I have not been there since '88, but I have very pleasant recollections of that visit. It was most gratifying. The people hardly seemed to regard me as a foreigner.

QUEEN

And the climate?

GLADSTONE

That I found most stimulating.

QUEEN

That is my own impression.

[*A slight pause.*]

GLADSTONE

Mrs. Gladstone, too, was greatly benefited by it.

QUEEN

I thought she was looking in excellent health when I last saw her. But she is so energetic in her many

good causes that I fear she will tire herself. You will tell her of my inquiries?

GLADSTONE

Most certainly. And I am sure she will be as touched by your Majesty's thoughtfulness as I am.

QUEEN

I hope you may be spared in your retirement to have many years together, and that your own health will be much improved. Have you consulted a German oculist about your cataract?

GLADSTONE

No, Ma'am. My man is English.

QUEEN

The Germans in that respect, as indeed in so many, are *much* superior. I am sure you would find their advice of great value. General Ponsonby shall send you the address of one I can *thoroughly* recommend.

GLADSTONE

That is kind of your Majesty.

QUEEN

And before you go there is one other thing I must mention, Mr. Gladstone. In fact, two.

GLADSTONE

[*Feeling his advice about to be sought.*]

In anything my experience can be of value to your Majesty, it is at your service.

QUEEN

In the first place, I am *very* pleased at the line your Cabinet is taking about increasing our armed

forces. It is *most* necessary, and I may say that from Liberals it is a most pleasant surprise.

GLADSTONE

Yes, Ma'am. And the other matter?

QUEEN

I want to thank you again for your service in the matter of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg's annuity.

GLADSTONE

That is hardly worth mentioning.

QUEEN

It was worth a very great deal, since it concerns my son.

GLADSTONE

Your Majesty thanked me amply at the time.

QUEEN

Nevertheless, I wish to assure you again that I shall not forget your service to the Crown in the matter. To think that those dreadful Radicals should grudge Alfred a mere £10,000 a year. After he had given up £15,000 a year of his allowance, too.

GLADSTONE

The point at issue, Ma'am, was whether our taxpayers should contribute that sum to him now that he had become a reigning German prince, owing allegiance to Germany rather than to England. They asked what would happen in the event of a war between England and Germany.

QUEEN

A war between Germany and England! But that is unthinkable.

GLADSTONE

Let us hope so, Ma'am.

QUEEN

And even if Alfred is now a German prince, he is still my son.

GLADSTONE

That is exactly what I pointed out to the House, and if there is any further service I can render in the matter, I shall most certainly do it.

QUEEN

[Alarmed at the prospect of Mr. Gladstone still in the House.]

But you are surely now going to take a long rest from work?

GLADSTONE

From leadership. But not from the House. If my sight permits it, there is still much work to be done. Your Majesty may recall a saying of Oliver Cromwell's: "Our rest we expect hereafter. That will be durable."

QUEEN

We are not interested in the views of that unfortunate regicide. But I do most sincerely hope that your health will improve. Good afternoon, Mr. Gladstone.

GLADSTONE

[Rising and bowing.]

Good afternoon, your Majesty.

[GLADSTONE goes out.]

She has not even given him her hand at the close of over fifty years' service. She looks for a moment at the portrait of Beaconsfield and sighs; then rings for PONSONBY, who enters.]

QUEEN

[*Gaily.*]
Well, Sir Henry, that is over.

PONSONBY

Yes, Ma'am.

QUEEN

This time, I think, he really has gone.

PONSONBY

Yes, Ma'am.

QUEEN

It was a great pity he ever came out of his retirement twenty years ago.

PONSONBY

According to his beliefs, Ma'am, I should suggest that Mr. Gladstone has served England very faithfully.

QUEEN

Then his beliefs were mistaken, Sir Henry. I am England.

PONSONBY

Mr. Gladstone, I know, has always been loyalty itself to your Majesty.

QUEEN

He has done a great deal of mischief, Sir Henry. A very great deal. His last speech was an attack on the Lords. It is *disgraceful* the way he has always pandered to democracy.

PONSONBY

Times are changing, Ma'am.

MR. GLADSTONE

QUEEN

Not while I live. A democratic monarchy I never consent to belong to. *Others* must be found if that is to be. I have had to tell Mr. Gladstone so more than once. Even *that* he took very little notice of. But fortunately he has failed. Absolutely. His last two Ministries have been failures. Indeed ('*with a most amusing little laugh*') his last three.
[*She looks at the portrait and smiles.*]

Dear Lord Beaconsfield would be *so* pleased.
never liked the man.

CURTAIN

